CHAPTER EIGHT

A Walk through Images

The concern for the visitors' itinerary inside the museum emerged during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Back then, according to Tony Bennett, museum institutions (as well as fairs and universal expositions) became places for 'organised walking' where the visitors' behaviour and the transmission of knowledge were regulated by more or less pre-determined itineraries, as was the (more or less implicit) imposition of a certain ideology and power relationships.[1] In contemporary museography, where the connection between objects and narrative has become more fluid and open to different interpretations,[2] the movements of the visitors remain nonetheless central for their capacity to activate, follow, and re-design meaningful itineraries.

The link between the museum path and the cinematic *dispositif* could be addressed in light of the broader question of the relationship between moving images and architecture. It was during the 1920s and 1930s that a strong connection between film and architectonic space came into place, both in theory and practice. Sergei Eisenstein's well-known essay 'Montage and Architecture' constitutes a pivotal attempt to ground theoretically the intersections between cinema and architecture.[3] Starting from Auguste Choisy's description of the positioning of buildings on the Acropolis of Athens, as related to the variable point of view of a walking observer, Eisenstein postulates a link between montage and the composition of an architectural ensemble, from the perspective of a moving spectator. Eisenstein considered sequentiality and montage as the two essential conditions of film as a medium and used them as a grid for the appreciation of other arts. His notion of 'cinematism', a series of structural proprieties that are independent from any medium,[4] allowed him to underline the temporal dimension inscribed in architecture as well as in painting.

Moreover, during the 1920s, as Olivier Lugon has explained, exponents of the avant-garde also established a strong link between the cinematic *dispositif* and the exhibition.[5] By experimenting with innovative ways of arranging objects, they conceived a series of displays that were deeply influenced by the dynamism and mobility of cinema. As Lugon writes,

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> what designers envied most about film was the possibility of controlling a sequence of images, of imposing on the visitor a planned progression of pictures, impressions and information. Hence the following challenge: how to extend this principle of unfolding to a three-dimensional space . . . ?[6]

In 1942, the previously mentioned exhibition designer Herbert Bayer described the MoMA exhibition *Road to Victory*[7] with a cinematic metaphor: 'to tell the story dramatically, I wanted to reverse the procedure of looking at the film were the public is still and the film moves. Therefore, in this case, I had the public move through the exhibition.'[8] As Olivier Lugon reminds us, Edward Steichen, the author of the exhibited photographs, reaffirmed the concept more incisively: 'the show is a moving picture . . . where you do the moving and the pictures stand still'.[9]

In the wake of this suggestion,[10] it is possible to imagine a reversal, between the scrolling of the film strip and that of the viewer: in cinema, the images move on the screen and the viewer remains still; in an exhibition, it is the viewer who moves and creates connections between the images. The components of the exhibition as well as the arrangement and lighting of the objects can mimic the cinematic language and its expressive components, such as shots, frames, montage, and camera movements.[11]

Moving images are characterised by a temporality that is intrinsic to their own unfolding, a fixed duration that is independent from the viewer's intervention. However, when featured in museums, they seem to produce an 'interference' with the layout. Indeed, in an exhibition, it is the visitors who determine the viewing time by means of their own movements. This opposition can introduce a conflicting dimension in contemporary museums: a 'shock of temporalities',[12] in the words of Dominique Païni, which requires a constant re-negotiation between the rhythm of the visitor and that of the display. The exhibition becomes a place where 'antagonist speeds'[13] intersect: moving images are usually repeated in loops that the visitor is free to abandon and return to.[14]

The exhibition of moving images thus emerges as the result of a mutual re-definition between spatial, chronological, and dynamic regimes that only appear to be mutually incompatible. This is the dialectics underlying numerous contemporary exhibitions, where linear itineraries are shattered into multiple temporalities by the encounter between the visitor and the moving images.

Galleries, Projections and Cinematic Effects: The Trento Tunnels

The Galleries of Piedicastello, also known as the Trento Tunnels, are two former road tunnels that were converted into exhibition spaces during 2007

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and 2008 and included into the Historical Museum of Trentino. Mostly devoted to regional history, they hosted a number of temporary exhibitions on various aspects of local history and populations. The first, presented in 2008 and titled *The Trentino and the Great War. The Disappeared People/The Found History*, described the First World War through the experience of ordinary people. As the exhibition epitomised a number of defining features of contemporary museology, it is worth analysing it, despite its temporary nature.

The first operation made by the curator Jeffery Schnapp was to differentiate the two galleries in terms of appearance and function: the first was painted entirely in black, the second in white, as if to mimic the black-and-white colours of the documents, letters, photographs, and film reels dating from the First World War.[15] In other words, the memory of the conflict was first and foremost perceived as a *mediated* if not *media-based* memory, and this defining characteristic determined the appearance of the entire exhibition space. Moreover, the two galleries were distinguished not only in terms of colour, but also in terms of atmosphere, display, and audience interaction: as Schnapp stated, the black gallery, 'emotive in emphasis, would provide an immersive experience of the war',[16] appealing to visitors' emotions and soliciting their bodily involvement. The white gallery had a more analytical nature, and illustrated through objects and labels 'how the memory of the war was constructed and translated into institutions during the post-war era'.[17]

The itinerary started with the black gallery. Divided into five chapters – one for each year of the war – the exhibition presented a series of projections on the walls, on the floor and ceiling, as well as on hanging tulle screens. Curators selected from historical archive materials such as photographic portraits of soldiers and civilians, fragments of letters written by fighters in the army, and extracts from documentary films, including the one that the Italian film pioneer Luca Comerio had shot in the Dolomites during the war. Visitors moved from south to north on a linear path that was slightly bent by the tunnel's curvature, across a space drowned in obscurity except for the light of the projections.

War scenes, family portraits, figures of soldiers, landscapes, and written texts, in black and white or tinted in purple, green, or blue, followed one another on the walls and on the floor, punctuating the visitors' stride. Different speeds were alternated and combined in the gallery: the unfolding of film loops, the alternation between moving and still images, the movement of the public through the tunnel. It was the visitors who, moving forward in the space, created a montage between the various projected images, creating their unique 'cinematic grammar': close-ups and details, full shots and overall views, and different angles (frontal, oblique, from above) followed one another in a dramatic alternation of climaxes and pauses. The visitors walked

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Figure 8.1 Trento Tunnels: the black gallery (photo Pier Luigi Faggion, courtesy of the photographer).

through figures of military and family groups; faces of children and elder people seemed to materialise and stare at them from the darkness; and marching soldiers seemed to emerge from the walls and move towards the visitors. The cinematic nature of the space was evident in the dynamic transitions from one image to another, which stressed the key role of the montage. The cinematic dimension also emphasised the temporal and spatial progression of the visit: the spectators' movement through the tunnel was characterised by changing rhythms and paces. It was therefore the displacement of the visitors' bodies that 'set in motion' the museum narrative.

The emotional impact of these images was enhanced by a variety of dramatic devices: for instance, figures of soldiers projected on tulle screens looked like actual ghosts conjured up in front the observers. The return from the past was assimilated to a kind of 'afterlife',[18] offering a fragmentary and enigmatic historical narrative.

The audience was involved not only as a looking subject, but also as a physical body. The projections covering the entire surface of the galleries literally surrounded visitors: the natural curvature of the walls distorted and almost deformed the images, creating an immersive and enveloping environment. Occasionally, visitors were turned into a projection surface as evanescent images overlapped with their moving bodies.

All the projections were mute, but the sound had a fundamental importance in the tunnel. Extracts of popular writings read aloud by the local elderly were diffused in the space: cardboard cylinders hanging from the

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Figure 8.2 Trento Tunnels: figures of soldiers projected on tulle screens (photo Pier Luigi Faggion, courtesy of the photographer).

ceiling oriented the direction of the audio so that the visitors passing under one of them could distinctly hear the voice reading aloud.

As a result, the words written during the wartime merged with the ghostly images of people from the same period, and also with the voices of living persons and the visitors' bodies, thus connecting past and present and dramatising the resurgence of memory and its transmission to future generations.

As Jeffrey Schnapp states, 'the black tunnel resuscitated . . . the phantasmagoria'.[19] As we have seen, the reappearance of this spectacular form in contemporary exhibition design is a kind of leitmotiv, especially when considering the role of moving images in displays.

Although the black tunnel show could not be literally considered a Phantasmagoria, it did revisit some of its peculiar features. Phantasmagoria is characterised by the presence of an invisible lantern placed behind a screen and by the movements of the figures, who seem to advance towards the motionless viewer. While the projectors in the tunnels were not entirely invisible, they remained nonetheless concealed by obscurity, and the images seemed to appear from the darkness. Also, unlike the motionless public of Phantasmagoria,[20] the visitors moved inside the gallery: however, they had to follow a pre-determined and linear itinerary, and were free to wander around only to a limited extent.

The black tunnel also created a Phantasmagoria-like effect in the spectator. As pointed out by Tom Gunning, the novelty of this nineteenth-century

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spectacular form resided in its capacity to manipulate the audience's perception, and to generate a fascination for uncertain and uncanny phenomena.[21] In other words, viewers were divided between the disquieting impact of what they perceived by the senses and their rational awareness that what they saw and heard was nothing but an illusion – an ambivalence that lays at the source of their pleasure.

Similarly, the black tunnel aimed to conjure up a range of uncanny effects to disturb the audience, such as the re-emergence of the dramatic history of the war, the portraits of wartime men and women that seem to stare at the public, the ghostly voices that recited words from the past. At the same time visitors rationally knew that these were merely illusions and theatrical tricks. However, the emotional impact was so strong that some of the visitors, especially among the elderly, were too disturbed to continue the visit.

A Film in Space: *Peopling the Palaces* at Venaria Reale

Peopling the Palaces is an installation created in 2007 by the artist and filmmaker Peter Greenaway for the interiors of the Venaria Reale (Turin), a palace built in the second half of the seventeenth century as a hunting base for the aristocracy. As the title suggests, Greenaway's installation aims to bring back 'life' in the deserted rooms of the palace and to offer a slice of life at the royal court.[22]

Greenaway's original itinerary unfolded through eleven rooms, of which five have become permanent,[23] featuring 100 'archetypal' figures of life at the palace, interpreted by actors and represented as they carried on their daily activities: the servants bustling about in the kitchens, the hunting parties, the court balls, and the final procession. These period characters are treated as ideal and exemplary figures rather than as real people: alongside the duchess, the architect, and the doctor, there is the idiot and the devotee, forming an ensemble of professions, social roles, and moral traits.

The idea of cataloguing, the process of enumeration, and the symbolic choice of the number 100 are a recurring motif in Greenaway's work. In the exhibition *100 Objects to Represent the World*,[24] the filmmaker acted as curator and created a list, halfway between the serious and the ironic, of objects that could represent every aspect of human culture. In the urban installation *Stairs Geneva*[25] he identified 100 locations, and in *Stairs Munich*[26] he illustrated the history of cinema in 100 screens.

If some of the motives present in *Peopling the Palaces* are in continuity with Greenaway's other work as an artist and filmmaker,[27] the fictional representation through audio-visual technologies of real or imaginary characters who 'return' from the past to show historical events is a recurring interpretive

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strategy of contemporary museums. Exhibition design and art installation converge in a project that epitomises the close and multi-faceted connections between art and historical/educational displays, not only in terms of tools and solutions, but also in terms of communication strategies.

The original installation started with the presentation of the court in the first room of the palace and included the two rooms of the kitchens, the four rooms of the private lodging of the duke, the haunting scene, and the two rooms of the procession of the court.[28] Greenaway's audio-visual narrative is composed of fragments of varying length, whose spatial distribution and presentation change from room to room. In the kitchens, for instance, we find a large central screen flanked by twenty smaller transparent ones, symmetrically arranged to the sides. During the dialogues, the images of the head chef and his assistants are scattered and multiplied across the different projections, whose reflections on the ceiling create a highly evocative spectacle. The spectral effect is emphasised by the interplay of transparencies and overlays: the images' evanescent quality is used as a means to create the characters' spectral appearance: they seem to return from past centuries to haunt the palace and share its spaces with the visitors.

The presentation of the moving images underscores their insubstantial quality, almost in counterpoint to the solidity of the objects and artefacts

Figure 8.3 Installation *Peopling the Palaces*: the kitchens (courtesy of La Venaria Reale, Turin).

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that usually constitute a museum display. The very architecture of the venue seems to lose its solidity and acquires an ambiguous status. The projected figures blend with and overcome the tangible architectural surface: the walls no longer delimitate the room, but give access to a further space, both evanescent and teeming with life.

In its combination of reconstruction and invention, this audio-visual narrative can in a sense be considered to be the heir of an older narrative form, the historical novel, which for Frederic Jameson is actually the other side of the ghost story:

> [W]hat is the [historical novel], indeed, if not an attempt to raise the dead, to stage a hallucinatory fantasmagoria [*sic*] in which the ghosts of a vanished past once again meet in a costumed revel, surprised by the mortal eye of the contemporary spectator-voyeur?[29]

For Jameson, the ghost story is always rooted in a physical space, primarily a home, 'a building of some antiquity, of which it is the bad dream'.[30] If the Venaria Reale Palace appears to the visitors as a haunted building, the initially uncanny experience of encountering these characters from the past soon turns into a curious cohabitation, in which the visitors can peek at the ghosts' lives, intrigues, and secrets. And the latter are precisely the aspects to which Greenaway chose to draw attention, so that the spectator is occasionally made to feel like a voyeur spying on the fragments of someone's private life: for instance, in the initial version of the installation, the figures of sleeping dukes were projected on the bed, at a short distance from the public.

The moving images and the space of the Venaria Palace in which they are projected are inextricably entwined. Greenaway developed the installation by bearing in mind the original function of the different rooms, and the spaces themselves – from the kitchens to the private lodgings – determined the action that was to be staged inside of them.

The full integration of moving images in the palace's itinerary can be seen as soon as in the first room, where the presentation of the court takes place: where ten characters, projected on six large screens disposed in a circle, introduce themselves to the visitors and chat with them. These eighteenth-century characters move around freely, sometimes disappearing, but re-emerging again at some point along the itinerary. Thus, from the very beginning, the visitor of this historical site also becomes the spectator[31] of a 'film in space' whose plot – which narrates the life at the court – unfolds even when the characters are not directly present, by virtue of the very possibility of their reappearance.

Although the various scenes could easily be brought together and composed into an actual film, their significance is precisely due to their

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being scattered across various and not necessarily contiguous rooms. The visitors/spectators connect the presence and absence of the moving images, in a montage that does not only concern the chronological order, but rather the spatial continuities and discontinuities of the projections, whether presented in adjoining rooms (as for the duke's lodgings in the original installation), or interrupted by rooms that contain 'only' furniture and artworks.

One of the narrative's dramatic devices consists in the transition from rooms devoid of projections, ideally silent, to crowded choral scenes of court life, creating a contrast between the quiet composure of the palace as a contemporary historical site and its past hustle and bustle. In other cases, the moving images create connections between spaces. During the court procession, the characters move between two rooms, disappearing from one only to reappear, shortly after, in the next. Their movement underscores the continuity between the two contiguous rooms, in a mise en abyme of the visitor's own movements. Also, the projections communicate with one another as well as with the objects and artworks on display. In the original installation, small portraits of ladies-in-waiting, interpreted by actresses, were projected on the walls of the private lodgings. The ladies dialogued with the 'real' portraits hanging from the walls, either by copying their iconography or by literally addressing them.

Visitors are free to design their own itinerary inside the palace, reconstructing the life of the time by intertwining the narrative of the moving images with the stories suggested by the motionless furniture and artworks.[32] The cinematic nature of the installation is at play not only through the presence of an actual audio-visual narrative, but also through its dynamic arrangement from one room to the next. As stated by Giuliana Bruno about Greenaway's installations – and *Peopling the Palaces* is no exception – the sequential organisation of cinema becomes the principle though which to read the exhibition.[33] Thus, the 'museographic walk'[34] and the flow of cinematic images are connected by a double thread, in a spatial montage in which the viewer acts as the element of junction.

Notes

1. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, p. 6.
2. See Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture.*
3. Eisenstein, 'Montage and Architecture'.
4. See Albera, 'Introduction', p. 12.
5. See Lugon, 'Dynamic Paths of Thought'.
6. Ibid. p. 131.
7. The exhibition was curated by Herbert Bayer, with photographs by Edward

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Steichen. It was held from 21 May to 4 October 1942 at the MoMA in New York. See 'Road to Victory: A Procession of Photographs of the Nation at War'.
8. Cited in Lugon, 'Dynamic Paths of Thought', p. 135.
9. Ibid.
10. On the relationships between cinema, architecture, and exhibition, see also Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*.
11. See also Bal, 'Exhibition as Film'.
12. Païni, *Le temps exposé*, p. 17.
13. Dubois, 'A "Cinema Effect" in Contemporary Art', p. 17.
14. Ibid.
15. Schnapp, 'Unlevel Crossings', p. 26.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. The term is resumed by Aby Warburg's *Nachleben*, which indicates the survival, or the re-emerging of images from the past, with their nature of revenants. An idea that breaks with linear transmission patterns and suggests a different temporality in the history of images, made of breaks and returns, of repetitions and differences. See Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas: Mnemosyne* and Johnson, *Memory, Metaphor, and Aby Warburg's Atlas of Images*.
19. Schnapp, 'Unlevel Crossings', p. 27.
20. See Mannoni, *The Great Art of Light and Shadow*, pp. 136–75.
21. Gunning, 'Fantasmagorie et fabrication de l'illusion'.
22. See the catalogue of the exhibition: Greenaway, *Ripopolare la Reggia/Peopling the Palaces*.
23. Namely the presentation of the Court (room 1), the kitchens (rooms 9 and 10), and the procession (rooms 28 and 29).
24. See the catalogue of the exhibition: Greenaway, *100 Objects to Represent the World*.
25. See Greenaway, *The Stairs 1: Geneva, the Location*, catalogue of the exhibition.
26. See Greenaway and Schweeger (eds), *The Stairs 2: Munich, Projection*, catalogue of the exhibition.
27. On Greenaway's installations, see Pascoe, *Peter Greenaway: Museums and Moving Images*.
28. Only the presentation of the court, the kitchens, and the procession are included in the permanent exhibition.
29. Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, p. 124.
30. Ibid. p. 123.
31. See Chittenden, 'The Cook, the Marquis, his Wife, and her Maids', p. 268.
32. On the interpretation of the meanings of objects in museums, see Pearce, *Interpreting Objects and Collections*.
33. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, p. 316.
34. Ibid. p. 154.

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